

The 1993 Chicago Symposium: It was stimulating; my thanks and congratulations to Doug Carlson for putting it all together. There was a surprisingly high level of appropriate skepticism, and I particularly enjoyed talking with quite a few researchers whose work is not widely publicized but who have done solid detailed work.

After hearing the speeches of so many leading critics in just three days, I was struck by the effect of the richness and ambiguity of the evidence in the JFK case. More than usual, someone's conclusions strongly reflect his own personality and the analytical tools he was trained to use. Some of us are advocates or activists, with a special interest in the big picture and the political context. Some of us are scientifically trained and irretrievably linear, with a keen eye for the contrary detail of evidence or methodological flaw which can invalidate even an appealing argument. Some are teachers or poets, who seem naturally inclined to distill information in a consciously original way, expecting to provoke varied responses. What about the journalists who have fewer doubts than I expect about the credibility of key witnesses - is that just because the witnesses are straightforward nice guys, or because these particular reporters are? So, what you get is not just what you see but who is seeing it, and how. This is a truism, but I think it applies particularly strongly to this case. Including, of course, this paragraph.

Tapes of the conference can be purchased from Imagi-Vision. (PO Box 284, Devon, PA 19333; flyer: 2 pp., #1993.1) At present, only video tapes are available. I expect they are worth watching if you have the time.

The big medical debate was disappointingly inconclusive, I think. I would reluctantly give the decision to the "JAMA side," on points. Cyril Wecht's rhetoric-based performance got no points from me, like the later speech by Mayor Bob Tanenbaum of Beverly Hills ("Jim Garrison 90210"). The Stone film has prompted work on both sides by doctors in relevant specialties who are new to the case. I don't feel qualified to evaluate that work but I am looking forward - perhaps unrealistically - to the development of a consensus.

There was some discussion of what should be done. Carl Oglesby was particularly insightful, as usual. I haven't kept up with post-conference developments, but there is at least one new group: CTKA (Citizens for Truth about the Kennedy Assassination), run by Jim DiEugenio and others, at 2139 N Vine St, Hollywood, CA 90068. I found a surprising amount of news in their newsletter, "Probe" (\$25 for 12 issues). Also, there has been much of value in recent issues of "The Third Decade," and in Gary Rowell's "The Investigator" (1501 Park Ave., Bay City, MI 48708).

I am not planning to go to this year's ASK conference in Dallas, but I hope to keep up by phone as it happens and afterwards. I declined an offer to talk; much of what I have to say about the state of the case in general is in this issue of EOC.

Freed files: A lot of new material, including CIA and HSCA records, is now available at the National Archives. The latest AARC newsletter consists of an informative report on the state of the files. (You should be an AARC member - 918 F St NW #510, Washington DC 20024 - but this item is also my #1993.2, 4 pp., undated.)

Some research tools exist at the Archives; some are computerized and searchable by name. A \$3 listing of files (including some from Presidential libraries) and a \$40 finding aid (which I have not seen) are available from AARC. My #1993.3 is AARC's descriptive price list for nine items, including a collection of LBJ transcripts.

AARC reports that quite a bit of material is currently identified as withheld. Clinton has named or formally nominated some members of the board which is to review the withholding, but there have been no Senate confirmations.

A report from John Judge of the Committee for an Open Archives appears in the latest issue (Vol. 2, #1-2) of "Dateline Dallas." (For that publication, write to the AIC, now at 110 Market St., Dallas TX 75202.)

I have talked to or heard about several researchers who have been digging into the files seriously, but I have few specifics and little of substance I can report. I myself have not even asked for the CIA's response to my memo to the Rockefeller Commission, released in part years ago, or any CIA memo on my visit to Langley (at their invitation) in 1973.

"Oswald, The CIA, and Mexico City:" The long-awaited "Lopez Report" (to which Dan Hardway, at least, also contributed) is now available, with some deletions. Al Rogers is planning to publish it, with an index and (optionally) related WC and HSCA

material. (For details, write him at Rogra Research, 848 Dodge Ave. #326, Evanston, IL 60202.) You can also order it from AARC for \$55. (My copy is 403 pages; a few seem to be missing.)

Peter Dale Scott is completing an analytical essay for Rogers; it is also available from me. (#4, probably about 12 pages.) In summary, Scott believes that a key to the government's failure to investigate properly is "that Oswald, in pre-assassination cables, had been falsely linked to ... Kostikov, in such a way as to create a misleading impression of a sinister KGB assassination plot."

I have had less success in sorting this evidence out, and I have thought about my problems with the emphasis on an Oswald impostor. The evidence remains ambiguous, but I wonder if the impostor hypothesis gets more attention than other aspects of the Mexico puzzle for non-evidentiary reasons - that is, as historical baggage which we picked up when we had much less information.

As I recall, that hypothesis originally focused on the photo of the Mexico Mystery Man, whose description from a photograph was erroneously attached to Oswald. (See, for example, the 1975 article "The CIA and the Man Who Was Not Oswald," by Fensterwald and O'Toole, reprinted in "The Assassinations.") As time passed, it became very unlikely that this man was an Oswald impostor - for one thing, he was photographed again when Oswald was supposed to be back in the U.S. - and he does not fit the description given by Sylvia Duran, now the leading impostor witness. In other words, if we first came to the Mexico evidence now, we might not find an impostor such an appealing explanation of the confusion.

Some clippings about the files are in a large pile under my desk; I don't know when I might get back to them. One of the few interesting commentaries was by Jefferson Morley, who focused on the anti-Castro plots, the "Lopez" report, and "does it really matter?" (Washington Post, 29 Aug, 2 pp., #5)

"Case Closed": As critiques of Gerald Posner's book, I recommend a review by Peter Scott (unpublished version: 8 pp., #1993.6) and a press release by David Scheim on Posner's use of Tony Zoppi (5 pp., #7). Also, AARC can provide a collection of Posner material. My own notes on the book remain unreviewed and untyped.

I have not been able to get worked up about the big-media support Posner has received - in part because Oliver Stone laid the groundwork for a backlash with his portrayal of the single-bullet theory as a joke, and by his skillful manipulation of the opposition in the press to "JFK."

The case for Oswald's lone guilt deserves better treatment than to be called "closed." The book's biggest distortion is implicitly placing the blame for the controversy on the critics, rather than on the evidence.

Phil Melanson has said that he doesn't mind being called a conspiracy theorist if people on the other side are called coincidence theorists. Novelist Don DeLillo ("Libra") would be a good coincidence theorist; Posner is not.

If the Warren Commission had done the reconstruction of the shots as well as the HSCA supplemented by Lattimer and Failure Analysis, we would not have spent years arguing about the number and direction of the bullets that hit. That would not have made the Commission right, of course, and I would never deny that the evidence is still unsettled. The case is certainly not closed on as basic an issue as the location, by the autopsy doctors, of the entry wound in the head.

Having written a stronger analysis of Garrison's problematic attitude towards homosexuality, I can still be offended by Posner's reference - without "alleged" - to something Garrison may have done to a minor. Likewise, a lawyer flatly calling Joe Molina a communist is a bit much.

I have talked to Posner only a few times, once at a local book signing where he offered a much more reasonable goal than "Case Closed" - to put "Oswald did it alone" back on the table, now that the discussion seems to be simply about which big conspiracy theory fits. Is this evidence for a "second Posner"? More likely - being as generous as I can - once he reached the conclusion that Oswald did it, his mad-dog Wall Street lawyer training took over and he went into a take-no-prisoners mode.

Over the years, I can recall only two writers who have tried to rehabilitate Tippit witness Helen Markham - Posner and one other lawyer. Even Wesley Liebler understood in 1964 that it was a bad idea for the Warren Report to say her testimony was of probative value.

Notably indefensible is Posner's treatment of Dr. Renatus Hartogs' recollection of Oswald as potentially violent at age 13. Typically, a footnote complains that

Hartogs "is not even listed in books written by" people including Thompson, Davis, Groden and Livingstone, and Lifton, whose books did not purport to be about Oswald's character. Posner quotes Meagher's conclusion that there is no basis for allegations that Oswald was crazy, and says it is contradicted by Hartogs, but does not mention that Meagher's conclusion followed a discussion of Liebel's discrediting of Hartogs' testimony. Liebel confronted Hartogs with his original report on Oswald, and it is quite obvious that his unrefreshed recollections of the Oswald case were inaccurate. Yet Posner quotes Hartogs' testimony, along with his apparently self-serving attempt to reconcile his testimony and the report. Posner gives a reason for Hartogs' omission of Oswald's violent tendencies - it "would have mandated institutionalization" - which I cannot find in Hartogs' testimony.

What is striking about this lawyerly behavior is that Posner does not need Hartogs to establish that Oswald was not an Eagle Scout at age 13, and in fact he does not need to present Oswald as a proto-assassin at age 13 to make his most impressive point: that, in 1963, Oswald's life may be seen as "spiraling out of control," with one failure after another.

People do things that don't make sense in terms of their own best interests - maybe Oswald did; certainly Posner did in his treatment of Hartogs, followed by an admission at the book signing that he knew about the problems with Hartogs' testimony.

Fair Play for the Hegelian Dialectic: Tom Filsinger has proposed a "convergence theory" of the assassination - basically, a conspiracy involving an emotionally unstable and violence-prone Oswald as a witting participant, if not a gunman. (Third Decade, 9/93) I am not persuaded by much of the evidence he cites (e.g., Nagell), but he has pointed his readers in a direction which is too often ignored.

Scott argues (in a chapter entitled "The Dialectical Cover-Up") that the lone-nut thesis quietly gained support at the top of the government as an alternative to the dangerous notion of a Russian or Cuban conspiracy. In the later debate, I would add, the antithesis that most critics quite properly adopted was of a completely innocent Oswald, which - combined with the evidence of a conspiracy - has perhaps inevitably led (in most of the public arguments) to a "big" conspiracy.

That is, the main debate has not encouraged exploration of a synthesis which takes seriously both the evidence of conspiracy and the possibility of Oswald's involvement - or even of just one gunman. The reasons for this limitation are historical as well as evidentiary.

"Deep Politics and the Death of JFK": This new book reminds me that Peter Scott may be the only researcher who can pursue his kind of analysis and come even close to persuasiveness. He qualifies as a real conspiracy theorist - or, rather, a political theorist whose analysis of the normal workings of society allows room for conspiracies as internal adjustments, not external anomalies. The information in this book, and the insight into coverups, is valuable to me even if the ultimate answer to the question "Who Killed JFK" is not Scott's own - "The Deep Political System" - but "Oswald did it alone."

"The Last Investigation": Gaeton Fonzi has expanded and updated his long 1980 article about the HSCA and his work for it. Most of my comments in 2 EOC 10 (pp. 2-3, #8) still apply, and I regret that I never finished and distributed detailed notes on that article. I am now persuaded that Veciana's account of Bishop's appearance and some of his activities was based on David Phillips, but I am as dubious as ever about his claimed sighting of Oswald with Bishop (which Fonzi immediately accepted).

Fonzi's sympathies clearly lie with passionate people like counsel Sprague, Wecht, Groden, and Veciana, and not with the scientific or lawyerly (e.g. Blakey). For a plodding analyst like me, it is hard to get past the fact that Veciana was a terrorist who tried to kill Castro, apparently lied about Phillips being Bishop, and could easily have figured out before they met that Fonzi was pursuing the JFK case.

My 1976 article (with ex-CIA man George O'Toole) about a Veciana-Odio link is what first turned Fonzi in Veciana's direction. I remain disappointed that it apparently did not lead to enough attention to the Dallas Cubans linked to Veciana's Alpha 66. In the book and the HSCA volumes, those Cubans get little attention; the staff report on Alpha 66 in Vol. 10 is mostly about Bishop.

Perhaps because Veciana said he did not know Jorge Salazar (at whose home, 3126 Harlendale, Alpha 66 usually met), neither that report nor Fonzi's book even mentions

Manuel Rodriguez Orcarberro, head of Alpha 66 in Dallas, who allegedly tried to buy guns from John Masen (who sold Mannlicher-Carcano ammunition in his gun shop and apparently resembled Oswald).

Other Books: Bob Callahan's "Who Shot JFK?" is the first book I would recommend to Stoned new buffs. It is a perceptive survey of the history and literature of the case. There are interesting original insights, e.g. on the de-sanctification of JFK as a traditional elitist derogation of oversexed Irishmen.

For an update and analysis of the Ragano story, see "The Kennedy Contract," by John Davis. In general, to keep up with the flood of books, I particularly recommend the catalogs of The Last Hurrah Bookshop (937 Memorial Ave., Williamsport, PA 17701).

"Exploring the Hidden Record" was the topic of the first of the two Chicago panels on which I appeared, described as an "Independent Research Workshop." The other speakers were Jim Lesar, Jerry Rose, Dick Russell and Mark Zaid; we were followed by Jim DiEugenio, John Judge, John Newman, Gus Russo, and Peter Scott, who had been asked to speculate about the content of that record.

Here are my prepared texts, as edited for presentation on April 1 and 2 - not revised to accommodate second thoughts, what I learned in Chicago, or later developments. Not knowing what to expect, I structured my comments around the topics proposed in the program (#1993.9, 8 pp.).

Good morning; thank you for coming. I'm pleased that I was invited to be on this panel; for one thing, I am not very active as a researcher now. I try to help other researchers, and I've already had the pleasure of seeing some of you in person for the first time. I help mainly by being an informed skeptic. I understand that raising questions about other people's work is relatively easy, but I know from experience how difficult it is to understand the available record and to get into the hidden record.

I am at a disadvantage talking this early in the symposium, but I intend to be frank about where I stand after nearly thirty years, off and on, of research. Primarily, I want to make a point to non-buffs and to new buffs in the audience: There is a lot of diversity and uncertainty among the critics.

If anyone wants to set up, as a test, the denunciation of Clay Shaw or of the Single Bullet Theory or of Burt Griffin, I won't pass it. And I know there are many other buffs who share some of my doubts about what seems to be the new orthodoxy.

Doug Carlson suggested that this panel include a review of the public record, in the context of the science of independent research. Thinking of the state of the case in the public mind, my first reaction was, what's research got to do with it? The success of Oliver Stone's film and the subsequent movement to "free the files," was built on facts and the work of many researchers, but it seems to really be about issues that go far beyond the events of November 22 - the nature of the press, of the government, of our society.

In this context, my key point about documentary research is that it may not be able to solve the case, but it certainly can make wrong solutions go away. There are plenty of allegations floating around which would not stand up to scrutiny based on the existing public record. One complication, of course, is that I'm not sure which of the allegations would go away. But I am confident that many would.

What results can we expect? Burt Griffin made a good point in his House Committee testimony in 1978: "consider the possible reality that under the American system of civil liberties and the requirement of proof beyond a reasonable doubt, that it is virtually impossible to prosecute or uncover a well-conceived and well-executed conspiracy." (5 HSCA 480) So the ambitions of documentary research - which is just one of the tools of such an inquiry - probably should be quite modest.

I think that the most promising areas for research - in the existing files as well as the new ones - are the facts of the shooting (particularly the medical evidence), Oswald (especially what the agencies knew about him), and the political context (particularly Cuba).

I hope we will make some progress this weekend in planning to deal with new material. Of course I would like to have everything on indexed CD ROM's. But we learned in 1978, from the work of Carl Oglesby and his AIB colleagues on the FBI files, that selection of interesting documents is a key step. Mark Zaid has put together some ideas along these lines. We're in the position of paleontologists coming across an enormous find which might consist of real bones. There is a lot of junk in the files.

Tips for analyzing documents: First, keep an eye out for the innocent explanation; then test it. Remember, sources make mistakes, FBI agents make mistakes, even researchers make mistakes. And some sources lie.

Things that are deleted may not be important. Not everything put in an assassination file is relevant to the assassination. For example: Mark Lane said that Priscilla Johnson was a suspect in the assassination, no doubt referring to a certain document where, if the case caption is undeleted, it is clear that she was a suspect in a case of potential KGB recruitment. Years ago, it became clear that many people, such as Igor Vaganov, were involved in shady activities in Dallas that probably had nothing to do with the assassination.

In short, most of the apparent evidence will turn out not to be true, even if it is not obviously false. That is certainly the typical experience of those of us who have worked as scientists.

Anyone who spends time in the FBI files develops his own filters for detecting probable junk. For example, letters from citizens which are typed in all capitals - single spaced, with no margins - or handwritten with about ten words per page. I suspect that a useful measure of the plausibility of an allegation could be derived from the percentage of well-known names. If a source claims to have met with David Ferrie, Allen Dulles, and Fidel Castro in Jack Ruby's nightclub, I'll go on to the next document. Any post-Garrison story with Clay Shaw in it starts with a heavy burden of skepticism to overcome. I now put Roscoe White in the same category.

Suggestions on assessing the credibility of physical evidence: Most important, remember that only one thing happened. It is no longer enough to just come up with leads and say they are interesting or should be investigated. I used to do that a lot myself. We need to filter out charges that don't hold up, as much as we can.

The technical work of the House Committee had quite an impact on me. The key fact is that specific items of Dealey Plaza conspiracy evidence have tended to get weaker over the years. This has been a surprise, naturally underappreciated - especially by newer buffs and non-technical buffs.

The big arguable exception is the medical and autopsy evidence, and I could never fully accept the official version of the shots until the anomalies in this area are more adequately dealt with.

We could argue at length about the imperfections in the House Committee's work, and in the work of the National Academy of Sciences panel which rebutted the acoustics. As some of you know, I've done my share, particularly on the acoustics.

But the fact remains that the House Committee took a stab at the tests the critics wanted - not completely, and not perfectly, but we expected that any one of the tests would demolish the WC reconstruction - neutron activation analysis, trajectory analysis. And they didn't.

Many people seem to agree with John Judge, who has said that we know where the shots came from, they came from the Pentagon. I don't think we know nearly enough about Dealey Plaza to make a jump like that.

The single bullet theory is not a joke. Despite its well-known flaws, the Warren Commission/House Committee reconstruction may be in better shape than any other single detailed reconstruction. At least, it has to be taken seriously.

To me, a key lesson from the state of the physical evidence is that much of the other conspiracy evidence would be weakened if subject to comparable scrutiny.

Wallace Milam has said that we have identified twelve of the three gunmen. We need to think what this means about our collective methodology. Are we the men who know too much?

On interviewing witnesses: I don't have any experience worth mentioning, so I'll make just one point: Watch out for principals who have become buffs, and are basing conclusions on information outside their areas of direct knowledge or expertise. If John Rosselli, for example, knew there was a shot from the knoll, it might not have been from inside knowledge, but because some of his friends, like many others, heard Mark Lane's stump speech. It seemed very significant that Dr. George Burkley said he thought there was a conspiracy, but the most I could find out was that he thought Oswald had more money than could be accounted for. One of the Dallas doctors, as I recall, thinks the head snap and simple physics constitute irrefutable proof of a shot from the front. They don't.

Suggestions on assessing the credibility of verbal testimony: I'll offer a corollary to Griffin's statement: If you recognize that conspiracies do happen but don't have a good methodology, you will end up believing in a big conspiracy behind

any major political crime.

Do I know what constitutes a good methodology? Not really. A couple of obvious points: Go to primary sources whenever possible. Many books are unreliable on details. For an example, again I'll pick on Mark Lane since he's not here: Lane accurately quotes a memo by Melvin Eisenberg as saying that Warren said that LBJ "convinced him that this was an occasion on which actual conditions had to override general principles." But it is obvious from the memo that the general principle being set aside is not Warren's "belief system and his sense of justice," as Lane says, but the principle that a sitting Supreme Court justice should not take an outside job like this. When people misinterpret documents that are readily available, how can you trust them on sources that are not easily checkable?

What about pitfalls? Watch out for allegations which look too good to throw out, for example because they seem to make the connection between Kennedy's enemies and the assassination - that is, to provide the closure everyone hopes to find. For example, some people latched on to the FBI document mentioning George Bush of the CIA without considering if the George Bush would be referred to in that fashion, and whether the contact described was that important or sinister anyhow.

David Lifton pointed out to me that it has gotten hard to pin researchers down about sloppy analysis, now that their fallback position can be that what they are looking for is a metaphor or a myth.

Sometimes it seems that the stories which catch on in the public mind are those with particular value as metaphor, or those which are pushed vigorously by some buffs. Don't assume that the best leads are the ones which have been waved around most prominently.

An example of a story which never caught on: I discovered that the lawyer who sent a telegram to Oswald in jail, offering to represent him, came from a civil-libertarian law firm here in Chicago which had defended Sam Giancana against alleged FBI harassment. I learned this quite by accident; the lawyer mentioned it to me. When I circulated this story, I played this connection down. But someone else could easily have picked it up and made a big deal of it, and then it would be one of those things that everyone knows is important.

Be careful not to give evidence a value proportional to the difficulty you had in finding it. Not everything being withheld is relevant. Realize how hard it is to discard as unimportant something you've spent many hours to get, but that's what good journalists and scientists have to do all the time.

Partial confirmation can be misleading. For example, Henry Hurt confirmed - with some difficulty - that a fire described by Robert Easterling had occurred, which may have made Hurt too inclined to believe Easterling's fantastic stories about the assassination.

Of course, one problem with concentrating on these pitfalls is that you might miss good allegations that look bad. For example, when I got the Sibert-O'Neill report from the Archives in 1966 and circulated it, Lifton was perhaps the only person not to discard the strange reference to "surgery of the head area." I don't know what it all means but I think he was right not to pass over it as obviously an FBI reporting error.

You may recall the story in John Davis' book about the mayor of Darien, Georgia, who said he saw Oswald getting money in what turned out to be a mob-linked restaurant. I sent that document to John to show him that another allegation we were discussing was not that persuasive to me, because such stories were so common. But this one turned out to get better, not worse, as you looked into it.

One funny story: I remember Robert Ranftel doing a late-night radio talk show and telling several conspiracy-minded callers that their favorite stories had been discredited, or didn't make sense anyhow. Then one caller started talking about his aunt having photographed Oswald in Russia, and got the same treatment; I was rolling my eyes and hoping that Robert would remember that, yes, some tourist did photograph Oswald.

Are we critics or researchers or skeptics or what? Being critical used to mean questioning the Warren Report. At first, document research was easy - check out their footnotes, ask for the Sibert-O'Neill report. It's harder now to ask tough questions about the beliefs of the anti-Warren Report majority and about the work of those who are building on the momentum of 29 years of research.

The critical community may be at a crossroads. Will the revived public interest in the case turn our research effort into something that belongs on shows like "Hard

Copy," along with UFO abductions?

I expect interesting discussions this weekend on unity among the buffs. Avoiding divisiveness on tactical grounds makes more sense for a minority movement than for people taking a view which is endorsed by an overwhelming percentage of the public.

We are not guaranteed progress towards the truth by adhering to the standards of science, or journalism, or law - certainly not law. But those standards have justifications and are certainly more applicable than the standards of political activism or filmmaking in getting at what actually happened.

Do we want to reach people who are not already "pro-conspiracy" (particularly reporters, academics, people in government)? I personally do. How? My gut feeling is to make it clear that they don't have to pick between two sides: a flat no-conspiracy viewpoint and a unified community of conspiratorialists (the most vocal of whom appear to be preaching to the choir). I would emphasize that the no-conspiracy side is not where you find most of the people who are seriously asking valid questions. If there is a basis for unity, it is a skeptical methodology, not any particular conclusions or interpretations of the evidence.

The role of US Intelligence, before and after the fact:

This panel also included John Newman, Dick Russell, Peter Dale Scott, and Tony Summers. The prior panel (Gaeton Fonzi, Phil Melanson, Robert Morrow, Bill Turner, Wayne Smith) was asked to focus on the CIA and FBI, and we were to look at other agencies.

I'm Paul Hoch; I was not involved in the assassination. [A reference to Morrow's claim that he was.] I'm flattered to be on this panel but a bit intimidated by the expertise of my colleagues here in terms of writing, public speaking, and putting the evidence together. I think we all could have civil and enlightening disagreements for hours on the issues raised in any one of their books.

I don't think we'll get a consensus on the big questions which Doug set out, so I'm going to narrow my focus. Briefly touching on those big questions:

To me, "government's role in the political violence of the '60's" mainly refers to events like the Vietnam war, including what it did to Americans; official opposition to the integration and civil rights movements; and the actions against Cuba, open and covert. The forces behind these were not simply the creation of rogue intelligence agencies. To some degree Peter Scott's analysis counters the Stone/Garrison idea of an external and conspiratorial source for the violence of the 60's, and the assassinations in particular.

For example, Hoover was not quite the anomaly he is sometimes made to appear, and his power rested not only on his use of derogatory information, but the fact that his goals were not that far from the establishment mainstream. At the risk of sounding like Alex Cockburn: historically, the possibility that the FBI instigated the assassins of Dr. King, or covered up for them, is less important than the certainly of the FBI's opposition to the whole nonviolent African-American movement.

What about Doug's implied question, who was behind the assassinations? "Well, as I er, well - I will answer that question directly then as you will not rest until you get your answer." [LHO, 21 WCH 639] I can talk only about the JFK case. I don't think there is proof of involvement by any intelligence agencies in a conspiracy to kill Kennedy.

"If so - if the agencies played a role - did they also close ranks to cover their tracks?" I think people covered their tracks even if there was no agency involvement in the assassination. Here Peter Scott and I disagree. My model is that there were many coverups, probably many independent ones. We should try to trace them back, but most will not lead us any closer to the identity of any conspirators.

One possibility - ironically - is that Oswald did it alone but so many people had things to cover up that the reaction of the government made it look like the assassination resulted from a conspiracy.

"Did they" play a role is not the same as "could they have." I hope that here one can weigh the allegations about involvement in the JFK assassination without appearing to say that nobody in the agencies could have been involved in anything like that.

Are legitimate national security considerations preventing a fair shake? "I would not agree with that particular wording." [LHO, 26 WCH 461] In my own words, that is a loaded question, since one doesn't have to accept the legitimacy of the national security considerations involved. I would say that some of the withholding

of information resulted from conventional concerns about apparently unrelated intelligence matters. (For example, the secrecy of intercepts of Oswald's mail, or Soviet Embassy mail, would have been enough reason to keep that information from the Commission.)

Which agencies should we be looking at?: I'm talking only about Oswald, and who he might have worked for at various times. I would suggest that such an employer is less, rather than more, likely to be behind an assassination conspiracy. That is, a conspirator would not want to use someone who could be linked to his own agency.

I think we can agree that this issue is important, whether Oswald was patsy, conspirator, or lone assassin. If anyone out there is booing: Either Oswald went crazy and shot JFK, or someone went to an awful lot of trouble to make it look like he did. What people do - including Oswald - doesn't have to make sense. It didn't make sense for him to want to kill JFK, but that's not as conclusive as I used to think it was.

I have no problem with focusing on "other" agencies at this point, rather than the FBI and CIA. I started out with a special interest in Oswald and the FBI. One thing I tried to confirm - and eventually did - is that the particular copy of the Corliss Lamont pamphlet which Oswald gave SA Quigley did have the 544 Camp Street address. In a note prompted by that FOIA request, Hoover called me a "smear artist" because I referred to "some sort of special and hidden relationship" between Oswald and the FBI.

Army Intelligence & Navy Intelligence: I now think some such special relationship is more likely to be with Army or Navy Intelligence. I can understand why nobody would be willing to say, in 1964, yes, we sent Oswald to Russia and brought him back, but that had nothing to do with the assassination. So, I will review some anomalies in the handling of some files in 1964. In several hours, we could try to figure out what these items mean, but for the rest of my time, I'll just read some quotes from some documents which might still provide leads.

At the very least, there are paper trails that were not followed fully by the official investigations, but may not yet be cold. One caution: you've heard the old joke about looking for your keys not where you dropped them, but by the lamppost where the light is good. The truth might lie where the clues are fewest and the paper trail smallest.

Since I'm going to speculate about purged or missing files, I should not forget the Dallas Police. CE 1409 is a rather detailed report by two Dallas police officers of an incident involving an unidentified white male passing out pro-Castro literature. Patrolman Finigan saw this man at the northwest corner of Main and Ervay, used the phone in Dreyfuss & Son, talked to U. S. Commissioner Madden Hill, and started to pursue him into the H. L. Green store - but was told by Sgt. Harkness to let him go. A reasonable amount of detail for a police report - but this was written in May 1964, about a year later. It's hard to believe there were no contemporaneous reports. I would like to see them, for comparison with these accounts - which are implausible in spots - and with one which appeared in the Times-Herald after the assassination. Basically, it is hard to believe that the Dallas Police had no file on Oswald, and documents like this might be the thread that unravels such a claim.

One thing I don't believe anyone has done is the tedious process of following all the copies of pre-assassination documents. For example, on October 23 the CIA sent a message to the Navy asking for the latest photo of Oswald, but when I asked in 1975 it couldn't be found in the ONI file, or elsewhere. The suspicion that raises is that someone cleaned up the file to hide the inadequacy of the Navy's response, but cleaned it up too much, leaving negative evidence.

I'm going back to the Warren Commission files, to point out that the junior staff had some good instincts in this area, among others:

On the FBI files: Quoting from a letter drafted by Counsel Sam Stern for Warren's signature: "The Commission would appreciate being furnished two copies of all FBI files on Oswald," including field office files, and "internal memoranda, teletypes..., internal surveillance reports on any surveillance conducted on Oswald, internal mail cover reports on Oswald, and the like." And, "to the extent feasible," non-file data, such as "extracts from the logs of the daily activities" of agents in contact with Oswald. Two copies, please. Obviously someone explained to Stern that Hoover would hit the roof, so the letter was never sent. The commission saw briefly, but did not even keep, just one file, the headquarters Oswald file.

On Defense Department files: In March 1964, the Commission finally asked the

Defense Department for everything on Oswald. The correspondence had gone something like this: "Send us Oswald's military records"; "Here's the personnel file"; "How about the Discharge Review Board file?"; "Here it is"; "We understand there was an ONI inquiry into Oswald's case; send us the ONI file and anything else." "Here's the ONI file." "There are references to Army Intelligence and other DoD agencies; are there any other documents?" Within 5 days, the response was "You've got everything."

Six months later, the Marines sent over Oswald's pay records. (CE 3099) The Commission never got the Army Intelligence file on Oswald, which - the House Committee established - was "'routinely' destroyed" in about 1973. I can agree with what Oliver Stone said about this - someone should un-routinely un-destroy it. Were no copies made in 1963?

What about the ONI file? The House Committee report is confused, but the Warren Commission got a copy. I've written at some length about the handling of this material right after the assassination, and speculated about the meaning of the provocative references to a "supplemental file," an "investigative file," and to someone being briefed on "3 files". Navy personnel were even reluctant to give the records to General Carroll, who headed the Defense Intelligence Agency - he got to see but not keep the file.

There were also instructions to "prepare a file" - not, it seems, to "prepare copies" or "make a copy." Is this just another odd choice of words, as when Cmdr. Humes was "instructed" that a piece of bone brought into the autopsy room had been "removed" from JFK's head rather than being told it had been blown off?

Here's another clue to an unexamined file: In 1973 the Archives released a copy of a CIA message about Oswald in Mexico bearing the notation "Passed to G2 - USMC 10/11/63." That's all I know about a possible separate Marine Intelligence file.

The answers to some questions may already be in the released FBI files:

Harold Weisberg sent me a document showing that in April 1964, FBI HQ noted that three Marines recalled giving a written statement or being interviewed after Oswald's defection. Nothing was found in the ONI files, so the St. Louis office was asked to check the personnel files of these three Marines. I don't know the result, but it may have been released years ago.

On November 28, the San Diego FBI was asked to check out a statement by the Commanding Officer at MACS-Santa Ana, Col. Ablett. Unfortunately, what I have is in telegraphese: "He additionally advised file reflecting security clearance investigation concerning Oswald maintained at Headquarters Eleventh Naval District, San Diego." Did he say such a file "was maintained" or "would be maintained" there? Again, I don't know where this inquiry led.

Last but not least: Oswald's DD-1173 card: Many of you are familiar with the article by Mary and Ray La Fontaine in the Houston Post last November 22, under the headline "Oswald ID card may be missing link." Basically, Oswald was issued a Uniformed Services Identification and Privilege Card, DD-1173. "It's a card officials today say Oswald should not have had," as a discharged Marine. Unless, that is, he was a civilian employee overseas needing a military ID. Such civilian employment... 'would not have been annotated to his military book.'"

Oswald used this card when he applied for his passport on September 4, 1959 - a full week before the issue date on the card.

I hope this audience is full of people asking "so what"? If Oswald was sent to Russia by the military, why would they give him a non-standard ID card? Not for the Moscow PX, and it could detract from a "legend." Possibly it was for his air transportation in Europe (although he took a nonmilitary ship there), or to identify his role to someone at the Embassy in Moscow. Or Oswald could have been given the card for some other intelligence assignment - such as checking out someone at Schweitzer College - which never got done. Intriguing as this card is, it is still hard to make sense of it.

What happened to this card after the assassination? As far as I know, neither the WC nor the FBI paid any attention to it. The Report gave much attention to the phony Hidell draft card; at no point does anyone seem to have known that the same photo appears on a second ID card.

The FBI should have examined the card for alterations. Someone has almost obliterated the card by testing. Relevant FBI records may be in the 1977 release, but I know of no easy way to locate them. A FOIA request for FBI records has been filed. It is a long shot, but the FBI records might even show that some other agency took possession of the card.

As I told the La Fontaines, "The HSCA attempted to deal with the possibility that Oswald had been working with the U.S. Government after he left the Marines. But as far as we know, they didn't deal with this card. It may have been the missing element." It may be as close as we have come to direct documentary evidence that Oswald's relationship with the U.S. government was not always what it seemed.

Mary La Fontaine has provided me with some new information from the USMC:

First, the regulations are unambiguous on one point: Whatever card Oswald got upon his discharge, it should have included a photo, and one print and the negative should have been in Oswald's service record book. The regulations even specify that the print should be attached to the negative with a paper clip. There is no such photo in the official file. This is relevant to the CIA request I discussed earlier, for a copy of the Navy's latest Oswald photo. This adds to the suspicion that the card was issued by someone not familiar with the proper procedure - for example, someone from another agency. I'm not completely sure, but it looks like the card should have been laminated; it isn't.

The Marine Corps provided the relevant section of the PRAM manual, and the version in effect some months earlier. The provisions of the revised section "do not provide for the issuance of the DD Form 1173 to Mr. Oswald on September 11, 1959."

The official explanation? "It is highly conceivable that Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron, Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, California did not have enclosure (2) [the revised version] by September 11, 1959, due to printing and distribution lag time that would have followed the April 7, 1959 signature date, and they were probably referencing enclosure (1), paragraph 3014.5" - which did authorize the DD-1173 for all Marine personnel except those on extended active duty.

"Highly conceivable." I would like to have heard the discussions that led to that oxymoronic phrase. It sounds like an awkward compromise between someone who knew about the procedures and would not accept "probable" and someone who was so concerned about the implication that Oswald had been some sort of civilian employee that plain "conceivable" wasn't good enough.

By the way, the La Fontaines were told by a historian at a Military History Institute that the April 1959 changes were in print by July. He had a better quote than "highly conceivable" - the incorrect issuance of that card could have been the action of "some harebrain in some far out post, in which case it would immediately be revoked."

In closing: I'm obviously not aiming my comments at people who are already convinced of a big conspiracy. But if you're a skeptical journalist or other investigator, please see what you can do to resolve, one way or the other, specific loose ends like these. You'll improve the reputation of those of us who take a skeptical approach to this case, and you might come up with evidence that will change history's judgment of Oswald.

Seth Kantor, 1926-1993: A leading expert on (and an acquaintance of) Jack Ruby, widely admired as a reporter, an author, and a nice guy who was helpful to me and many researchers.

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Ted Gandolfo, 1930-1992, 1993-: EOC regrets to inform you that there was an error in the previous issue; Ted Gandolfo is still alive. He told me that "I pretended to be dead for reasons which do not concern you or your ilk." (He has me pegged as a paid propaganda asset of the CIA.) In the future, I will not accept complaints about obituaries from their subjects.

Credits and apologies: Thanks to all the sources mentioned above, and to everyone who has been sending me clippings, even though keeping up with them through listings in EOC has evidently become impossible. Now that the HSCA volumes are on CD-ROM, and there is talk of making the released files available that way, perhaps we should think about electronic access to published books and articles - which are generally a better, and certainly a denser, source of information.

I keep uncovering unanswered letters from several years ago. My backlog is so large and chaotic that I tend to reply to more recent letters first - so, if you have given up on me as a correspondent, please write again.

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